

STEADYING CAMERA SUPPORT PLATFORMBackground and Summary of the Invention

The present invention is directed to the field of camera mounts. More particularly, the present invention comprises a camera mount for hand-held video recorders which can hold a camera steady if the support platform is maintained within $\pm 60^\circ$ about the x-axis and the z-axis while permitting complete unimpeded rotation about the y-axis.

A number of devices, such as Steadicam® stabilizing device, have been developed for use by professional cameramen. These devices are, typically, large, bulky and too expensive for use by the average video buff and, many of these devices are unsuitable for use by the smaller, light-weight video cams available today.

The steadying camera support platform of the present invention provides a much simpler, effective device for use with the camcorders currently being used while providing a great deal of flexibility for both mounting the camera and obtaining a variety of shots for the user. In addition, the support platform of the present invention maintains the video camera level, front-to-back and side-to-side, if the platform is maintained within $\pm 60^\circ$ from horizontal. The present invention comprises a platform to which the camera is secured; a support shaft attached to a bottom surface of the platform; a sphere affixed to an upper portion of the support shaft; a socket plate member which pivotally captures the sphere in a socket formed therein; a balance plate mounted on a bottom portion of the support shaft to help counterbalance the weight of the camera; means attachable to the socket plate member by which the platform support and its cargo is suspended; whereby when the platform support with its cargo is transported during video taping using the means attachable to the socket plate member, the camera is maintained in a steady position.

The socket plate member permits the sphere to pivot $\pm 60^\circ$ about the 'x' (or roll) axis, $\pm 60^\circ$ about the 'y' (or pitch) axis, and $\pm 360^\circ$ about the 'z' (or yaw) axis. The support shaft is preferably

formed in a first upper portion and a second lower portion with the first upper piece capable of being locked in any desired position within an angle of $\pm 60^\circ$ relative to the second lower piece. This will enable the user to obtain an upwardly or downwardly peering viewpoint for her/his shot.

5 The socket plate member is preferably formed as a first upper plate with a first downwardly directed truncated spherical recess and a second lower plate with a second upwardly directed truncated spherical recess, the first and second truncated spherical recesses capturing the spherical ball and serving as the spherical ball's bearing surface. The spherical ball is preferably made of a self-lubricating material such as TEFLON polymer.

10 The means attachable to said socket plate in one embodiment comprises a handle. The handle preferably has a first straight portion and a second angled portion, the second portion being angled downwardly 15° with respect to first straight portion. The means attachable to said socket plate in a second embodiment comprises a hands-free support arm. The hands-free support arm comprises a first top bar pivotally connected to a first vertically extending member at its first end and to a second vertically extending member at its second end; a second bottom bar pivotally connected to
15 the first vertically extending member at its first end and to the second vertically extending member at its second end, the first top bar, the second bottom bar, and the first and second vertically extending members forming a parallelogram linkage; means to attach the first vertically extending member to the camera platform support; adjustable leveling means associated with the second vertically extending member to position the camera platform support at a desired height; attachment
20 means to secure the hands-free support arm to a user's body; whereby a full weight of said camera support platform and the camera mounted thereon is carried by the user's body leaving her/his hands free.

25 The adjustable leveling means can take the form of an air cylinder connected between said parallelogram linkage and said second vertical member and a secondary reservoir to provide cushioning against jerking movement. Alternatively, the parallelogram linkage can be mounted on a support block with the second lower bar being extended such that an adjustable spring can engage the portion which extends beyond its pivot point to cantilever the hands-free unit and its cargo.

Another aspect of the present invention is a dual platform mounting system for supporting

multiple cameras to enable a photographer to simultaneously obtain multiple shots in different directions. When editing the film, the two views can be joined together in the same frame or spliced seriatim to show the different views, for example, in opposite directions. This configuration includes a first platform to which a first camera is secured; a support shaft attached to a bottom surface of said platform; a balance plate mounted on a bottom portion of said support shaft to help counterbalance a weight of the first camera, said balance plate mounting a second camera; means attachable to said support shaft by which said platform support and its cargo is suspended; whereby two cameras may simultaneously video tape in different directions to provide a film editor with differently directed shots taken during a single take.

While the simplicity and, hence, the lower expense associated with the current platform support will make the device of the present invention attractive to the amateur photographer, the versatility and practical features of this device will make it a favorite with the professional, as well.

Various other features, advantages and characteristics of the present invention will become apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art after a reading of the following specification.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The preferred embodiment(s) of the present invention is/are described in conjunction with the associated drawings in which like features are indicated with like reference numerals and in which

- 5 **Fig. 1** is a side view of a first embodiment of the platform support of the present invention;
- Fig. 2** is a side view of the first embodiment with the handle rotated 90° and with the upper piece of the support shaft tilted forward;
- Fig. 3** is a side view of the first embodiment with the handle canted rearwardly a maximum amount (at least 60°);
- 10 **Fig. 4A** is a top view of the top platform plate of the first embodiment;
- Fig. 4B** is a top view of the bottom platform plate of the first embodiment;
- Fig. 5A** is a perspective view of the socket plate of the first embodiment;
- Fig. 5B** is an exploded view of the socket plate;
- Fig. 6** is a side view of a second embodiment of the invention;
- 15 **Fig. 7A** is a front view of the lower mount depicting its mounting range;
- Fig. 7B** is a side view of the lower mount showing a camera mounted to tape straight down;
- Fig. 8** is a side view of a first embodiment of a hands-free arm; and
- Fig. 9** is a side view of a second embodiment of the hands-free arm.

Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiment(s)

- 20 A first embodiment of the platform support of the present invention is depicted in **Figs. 1-3** generally at **20**. The platform support **20** includes support plate **22** with support shaft **24** attached to the bottom of support plate **22**. Support shaft **24** preferably has a first upper piece **26** and a second lower piece **28** joined by pivot joint **30**. Lower end **27** of upper piece and upper end **29** of lower piece **28** are radiused to permit pivoting of at least $\pm 60^\circ$ from vertical (see Fig. 2). Loosening and
- 25 re-tightening adjustment screw **32** will permit the user to obtain either an upwardly or downwardly

peering camera angle of between 0 and 60°.

Mounted on the upper portion 26 of support shaft 24 is a spherical ball 40 which has an axial hole 41 there through of a diameter sufficient to accommodate the upper portion 26. A cotter pin 34, or the like, holds the ball 40 against upward vertical movement while the shoulder 36 formed atop lower piece 28 of the support shaft 24 restricts its downward motion. Spherical ball 40 is preferably made of a self-lubricating material, such as TEFLON polymer, while the balance of the platform support 20 is preferably made of aluminum, or a similar light weight material. A socket plate 42 is formed of a first upper plate 44 with a downwardly directed truncated spherical recess 46 and second lower plate 48 with an upwardly directed truncated spherical recess 46' (Figs. 5A and 5B). These two recesses 46 and 46' capture spherical ball 40 and serve as its bearing surface, permitting at least $\pm 60^\circ$ rotation about the 'x' (or roll) axis and the 'y' (or pitch) axis, as limited only by the engagement of the socket plate 42 with shoulder (36 Fig. 3). Spherical ball 40 can freely rotate in socket plate 42 about the 'z' (or yaw) axis freely turning about the z-axis through 360°.

Handle 50 has a first straight portion 52 which is retained in an aperture in an edge portion 43 of socket plate 42 by thumb screw 56. A second straight portion 54 of handle 50 is angled downwardly 15° from the first straight portion 52 to provide a more natural gripping angle for a user's hand and providing better balance. A balance plate 58 is attached to the bottom of the support shaft 24 and provides a surface upon which the device 20 can stand, with or without the camera attached to support plate 22.

As seen in Fig. 4A, support plate 22 has a plurality of mounting slots 38 to permit a camera to be mounted in a variety of positions covering virtually any direction. With the camera thus mounted, the platform support 20 can be carried using handle 50. While walking, the socket plate 42 cushions the bouncing, or jerking, motion associated with walking so that the camera moves smoothly during video recording while maintaining the camera vertically plumb recording a horizontal frame so that the video quality is not disturbed. By grasping the balance plate 58 or the support shaft 24 with the other hand, the platform plate 22 with the camera thereon can be rotated 360° about the yaw axis to provide a complete panoramic view. In addition, the camera platform can be tilted about the pitch axis to look vertically, up and down a building, for example, as much

as $\pm 60^\circ$, while jostling around the roll axis of handle **50** will not be imparted to the camera, as long as the movement does not exceed $\pm 60^\circ$.

A second embodiment of the platform support of the present invention is depicted in **Fig. 6** generally at **20'**. In this embodiment the balancing plate mounted on the bottom of support shaft **24'** is replaced by a second support plate **22'**. **Fig. 4B** depicts the pattern of slots **60'** formed in second lateral support plate **22'**. Second lateral support plate **22'** is mounted to vertical arm **63'** of L-shaped support plate **62'** by thumb screw **64'** threadingly engaging in block **66'**. As seen in **Fig. 7A**, second lateral support plate **62'** can be pivoted to any desired angle throughout 360° (with the exception of the 20° occupied by the horizontal arm **61'** of L-shaped support plate **62'**). By mounting the camera **11'** on the vertical arm **63'**, the camera can be pointed directly downward as seen in **Fig. 7B** or, if mounted on the outer face of vertical arm **63'**, directly upward. The benefit provided by this second embodiment **20'** is that the film maker can simultaneously obtain views in a plurality of directions in a single shoot. The lower camera **11'** further provides a counter weight for the upper camera, balancing the platform support **20'** about the pivot of spherical ball **40'** in socket plate **42'**.

It is a further feature of the present invention to provide a hands-free support arm, a first embodiment of which is depicted in **Fig. 8** generally at **70**. Hands-free support arm **70** comprises a first top bar **72** pivotally connected to a first vertically extending member **74** at its first end **71** and to a second vertically extending member **80** at its second end **73**. A second bottom bar **76** is pivotally connected to the first vertically extending member **74** at its first end **75** and to said second vertically extending member **80** at its second end **77**, first top bar **72**, second bottom bar **76**, and first (**74**) and second (**80**) vertically extending members forming a parallelogram linkage. Air cylinder **82** is connected to the second bottom bar **76** by extending plate **84**.

In this embodiment, the second vertically extending member **80** is an auxiliary air reservoir tank with an input port **86**. The platform support **20** (or **20'**) is attached to the hands-free support arm **70** by inserting protrusion **88** in the opening in edge portion **43** of socket plate **42** and attaching thumb screw **56**. The vertical height of the platform plate **22** (or **22'**) can be adjusted by adding air

to or letting out air from input port 86. It will be appreciated that different size and weight cameras will require a different pneumatic pressure to provide the desired positioning. The auxiliary air reservoir tank 80 is connected to air cylinder 82 by supply tube 81. Hands-free support arm 70 is mounted on the photographer's body by suspension strap 90 and a second stabilizing strap (not shown) attached to the bottom of auxiliary air reservoir tank 80 and tightened around the photographer's waist to restrict swaying of the arm 70 and its cargo.

A second embodiment of the hands-free support arm of the present invention is shown in Fig. 9 generally at 70'. In this second embodiment, the second vertically extending member 80' is a support block. First top bar 72' extends through a slot in the front of support block 80' and is pivotally secured internally of block 80' at 73'. The second bottom bar 76' has an extended length 92' which extends beyond the pivot point 77', which is also internal to support block 80'. A coil compression spring 94' interacts between first reaction surface 93' on the extended length 92' of bottom bar 76' and an adjustable reaction surface 95' inside the support block 80'. The position of adjustable reaction surface 93' can be altered by tightening or loosening the thumb screw 96' to increase or lessen the force on extended length 92' to provide adequate force to cantilever the weight of the platform support 20 (or 20') and the camera(s) mounted thereon.

The present invention is available under the name STEADY ORB and provides benefits over existing camera mounts which are readily apparent. The first embodiment of platform 20 provides a support for the video cameras which are commercially available and provides an alternative to the expensive camera-steadying devices currently available for both the amateur and professional photographer. In addition, the second embodiment provides steady platform support for multiple cameras enabling a photographer to record simultaneously several views of an event. Lastly, several embodiments of a hands-free unit which can be used with this or other camera platforms is shown.

Various changes, alternatives and modifications will become apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art following a reading of the foregoing specification. It is intended that any such changes, alternatives and modifications as fall within the scope of the appended claims be considered part of the present invention.